

ANIMATED SHORT FILM:

DISCORD

A CREATIVE PROJECT

SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE SCHOOL

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS

FOR THE DEGREE

MASTER OF FINE ARTS

BY

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## **ABSTRACT**

**CREATIVE PROJECT:** *Discord*

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For my creative project, I have created a 3D animated film that focuses on the character's internal dilemma and aesthetic expression. The title of this film is *Discord*. The film is summarized as, “Magical sisters explore an ancient temple and discover clues about their powers and their identity.” The lost temple contains information about their identity and sheds light on their purpose relating to their mythical powers. The purpose of this film was to create an original story that has an impact on popular culture. I am visually showing the philosophical debate, Relationships versus Singularity along with minor internal dialogues, such as communication, forgiveness, and overcoming personal dilemmas. Relationships come into people’s lives naturally through communication and effort, and many relationships become difficult due to a lack of these things as the relationship progresses. Within my film, I chose to display how positive relationships can create a better environment for all members involved. Throughout this process I relied on *The Writer’s Journey: Mythic Structure for Writer*, by Christopher Vogler to gain insight and to showcase the progressions of the relationship.

## STATE OF THE PROBLEM

I situate myself as a contemporary artist through aesthetic expression meaning I expressed my philosophy and thoughts through my unique interpretation of art.<sup>1</sup> Aesthetic is our first visual language, before communicating vocally we have the unique ability to express ourselves through art. I want to emphasize beauty through conceptual storytelling as a form of communication. As a visual artist, I enjoy exploring different aesthetics in order to evoke different emotions. Due to the multifaceted nature of aesthetics, I think this aesthetic expression is an ideal way to communicate effectively. This communication is important to me because of how communication affects and impacts relationships.

I use animation to express my thoughts and beliefs. Artists have used animation to tell a narrative or abstract story to convey a message or a philosophical debate. In doing so, the audience starts to be aware of a situation that has been hidden or not discussed in the real world. Artists like Rebecca Sugar, and Pendleton Ward, created animated series that have an impact on our culture. Sugar created *Steven Universe* [Fig 1], which is about a boy who lives with three guardians who are aliens and protectors of the world. The universal message of *Steven Universe* is about love and accepting everyone. Ward created *Adventure Time* [Fig 2], which is about a human boy and his best friend, a shapeshifting and talking dog, who participate in various wacky adventures. Each episode gave us many questions such as “What is considered good, from a moral standpoint?”, “What makes a good leader?”, and “Is it alright to forgive someone who does something bad continuously but cannot control himself or herself?”. These

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<sup>1</sup> Nahm, Milton C. "The Philosophy of Aesthetic Expression." *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 13, no. 4 (1955): 458

questions, similar to the ones asked in *Steven Universe*, are impactful and question our morals. Even though the exterior of the show is crazy and fun, the interior makes us think and question our culture and society. In order to showcase these questions within each episodic story, they would use characters that have various personalities (flaws, strengths, internal dilemmas, and philosophies perspectives). They would put their original characters and showcase how each individual would handle or overcome these obstacles in different situations.

The messages I want to address through my creative project are relationship, unity, forgiveness, and the resolution of a moral dilemma. I want to communicate to my audience about the journey and what it takes to make a relationship strong and cohesive. The problem is that there is a breakdown in communication in many relationships due to a lack of knowledge or a lack of interest. There is often an unrealistic expectation, which can lead to a breakdown of the relationship itself. Without communication, relationships cease to exist.

The film begins by introducing two sisters, starting with the youngest Iris, then followed by her older sister Sophi. Both sisters have unique magical abilities. Iris has the ability to conjure fiery energy, while Sophi has an ability to create light constructs with a single thought. They believe this ancient temple holds information about their identity and their magical powers. Both sisters are working together to uncover the secrets within this temple. The temple contains information about their identity and purpose in relating to their magical powers. Iris's exuberant personality is the initial cause of the conflict between the sisters, as she is exploring the lost temple room by herself, she recklessly unleashes a monster. The monster has the ability to mimic and can take on the appearance and ability of whomever it touches. Both sisters try to tackle the monster alone but end up causing more harm for both of them. After being hurt by the monster,

they realize they cannot defeat it alone. Only learning to work together are they able to defeat the monster and escape the temple alive.

My two characters' personalities are completely opposite from one another, and as such they lack understanding of each other. Sophi is calmer, passive, and a planner, while Iris is brash, aggressive, and spontaneous. When the situation of the mimic emerges, I visually show them succeeding in their own methods of actions. When the Mimic first emerges, I make it clear that their individual methods are not enough. Eventually, both sisters realize that implementing their methods together is the only way to resolve the situation.

The monster in the story is a doppelganger, a creature that has the ability to mimic and shapeshift. The monster becomes one of the sisters on two separate occasions and represents both sisters' inner turmoil. In the story, both sisters try to extinguish the monster individually, but find that it is not enough. Eventually, they do it together, which visually explains to my audience that it is alright to have help, and you do not have to fight alone.

I have been involved in the creation of three different films, and in each film, I explored a different type of animation; 3D, 2D, and stop-motion. While working on each film, my colleagues and I were able to experiment with various techniques, styles, and different types of narrations. When we were working on *Chasing Jenny*, we blended two different mediums in the film. 2D animated characters and 3D environment. It created a unique aesthetic when we merged the two mediums together. With the stop-motion film, *Dairyland*, we used a variety of materials creating the film and we used different materials to create unique scenes for the character to explore.

I enjoy blending multiple mediums together because multiple forms of animations are more aesthetically pleasing and complex. In this film, I am blending 2D animated special effects

over 3D scenes and characters. It will create a unique visual experience for my audience. With my animation and aesthetic, my design is a mixture of western and eastern animation styles, because a variety of animation from different cultures have influenced my style as a growing artist. As an artist, not only do I create, I also explore and experiment with different styles and mediums. This animation is going to be more dynamic and stylized, along with certain cameras placed at more exaggerated angles. This contrasts with some of my previous work. This approach is experimental for me, but I believe that exploring different compositions within the shots can increase the dynamic tension and emotional connectivity.

While focusing on the technical side and the aesthetic in my art, I also want to venture more into the conceptual arena. I wanted to express myself through a different form of medium that will carry over more of my original sets of skills in 2D Animation. I am branching out into being a narrative visual storyteller. As I have been branching out as a visual storyteller, I am better able to visualize conceptualize internal dialogue, and to make a connection between my audience and my characters. *Discord* focuses more on communication and strengthening relationships between family and friends, which is an issue I believe deserves more screen time. The blending of multiple animations will strengthen the uniqueness of the film and using a narrative animation will help to express the thoughts and feelings of my characters so I can better share it to my audience.

## REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

I am a visual effects artist, meaning I focus on the form above all else in my art. In this role, I do compositing (blending multiple mediums to make one seamless medium), and create special effects, such as explosions, shattering objects, simulated flight, etc. When I was young, I started reading fictions, comics, and animated shows, and because of them I wanted to create the movie “magic” I saw on screen. At a young age, I would pretend to be a hero from a story that I conceptualized. Many times, I would imagine I could shoot fireballs at my pretend antagonist or fly a skyship. As I developed as an artist, I was able to learn how to create special effects in a cinematic and 3D animated film. I focused on creating a realistic aesthetic to aid my visual effects and explored stylized and exaggerated effects based on 2D animation. In certain 2D animation and comics, the artist/animators would stylize their explosions, and implement fantastical architectural buildings in their original world, both of which I found very inspiring.

As I was growing up, I would watch Disney films and movies. Even though these shows were inspiring to me, they did not have the same impact on me as animated television shows and Japanese Animation did. I was influenced by *Batman: The Animated Series* [Fig 3] by Bruce Timm, and *Dragon Ball Z* [Fig 4] by Akira Toriyama. These shows inspired me to draw because of their unique styles of characters, unconventional storytelling, and stylized animation. *Dragon Ball Z* influenced me to draw unique fight scenes and create characters with unique abilities, such as energy blasts. Eventually, Cartoon Network started importing several Japanese Animation (known as Anime). This was by far the most inspiring to me. I was inspired from watching these shows, and so I decided to be an animator.



I explored different types of animations styles and roles within the animation production pipeline besides pre-production, conceptualizing story, characters, and the world. As a junior animator, I researched many technical skills, and studied them to gain more techniques. I would do light and color studies for visual aesthetics in my compositing, rendering, and visual effects. I branched out learning how to create computerized simulations through 3D applications, in which I have more freedom to create various forms for water, fire, and shattering effects.

My aesthetic and forms were heavily influenced by *Gurren Lagann* [Fig 5], directed by Hiroyuki Imaishi and written by Kazuki Nakashima, *Pacific Rim* directed by Guillermo del Toro, *The Hobbit*, and *Lord of the Rings* directed by Peter Jackson. *Gurren Lagann* compelled me to go beyond the limitation of realism, and to simulate those visual effects in the 3D world. Besides this show having compelling storytelling, it is known for its extreme animation style. It is a 2D animation, and the key animator, Hiroyuki Imaishi created an exaggerated, yet beautiful visual effect. Although this technique may be time-consuming for most animators to apply, it is something I was excited to pursue. Witnessing the beauty of the animation style within the show made me challenge myself to apply 2D animation visual effects into the realism of the 3D world. Many directors of 3D animation films want to make their animations fit in the real, physical world, and although I do appreciate the animation and effects from those films, I see no reason for that limitation. I am applying my influences and methods into my creative project film in order to show other animators that this it can be done.

*Pacific Rim* [Fig 7], *Lord of the Rings* [Fig 8], and *The Hobbit* [Fig 10] are my three favorite films due not only to story, but for their achievement with 3D assets in their films. For example, in the *Lord of the Rings*, I was amazed with the Troll and Goblins encounter within the Mines of Moria. The rendering and animations of the Troll interactions with the actors was

nothing short of inspiring. *The Hobbit* pushed the technology potential for creating complicated scenery, and mythical creatures. The implementation of motion capture for Smaug and the White Orc are good examples of this. With the Orc, they developed an intricate muscle simulation for his whole body, and a similar method was used for Smaug. In *Pacific Rim*, watching gigantic mechs (machines) fighting against the Kaijus (monsters) in the water completely blew my mind. It was very inspiring to watch the water caressing the metal chassis of the mechs and seeing the animation of their movement and fighting was nothing short of astounding. The extent of the work put into the film and research is amazing. In short, these three films have shown me that the impossible is possible. They inspire me to create original worlds of my own, to express myself and share with my audience.

Many shows, comics, novels, and pen and paper role-playing games have influenced me to be a storyteller. For years, I would immerse myself into fantastical worlds, and become invested towards many characters. While I was growing up, I slowly began to understand why these stories had such a strong effect on me. I developed knowledge about the story-structure for films, and how to execute a successful visual narrative story. I began to follow *The Writer's Journey: Mythic Structure for Writers* by Christopher Vogler, which allowed me to understand why these stories affected me the way they did. Vogler bases his story-structure from *The Hero's Journey*, by Joseph Campbell. Campbell dissected and created a structural foundation of a "hero" based on stories from myths and tales. He breaks characters down into Archetypes; Archetypes are character functions that play a role within the story. For an example, the Mentor is a teacher for the hero, or a prophet that would give an answer to a situation within the story. Vogler applied "*The Hero's Journey*" to films. The beauty of *The Writer's Journey: Mythic Structure for Writers*, is that the story structure is broken into three acts, and within these three

acts they are broken down into small parts that meet the narrative requirements. With these parts, you can alternate the path the hero travels. The hero is not bound to a strict rule, but rather Vogler lays out a foundation that is meant to be a guide for any storyteller to use.

When I started to re-read particular fantasy and sci-fi novels, my father took notice and introduced me to a pen-and-paper board game, called *Dungeon and Dragons*. It is a role-playing game, in which one plays with other players in order to create a character narrative story together. There are two types of players, one is called a Dungeon Master, and their role is to create a world. This world comes with non-playable characters, key plot points, and encounters for the players to interact with. The rest of the players create an original character with a set numbers for attributes and traits they can focus on in order to advance the story. All the players would work together in tackling whatever tasks or threats that have been laid out for them from the Dungeon Master. It is a cooperative game which requires all members to work together in order to create a thrilling, and fun, narrative story.

In this game, I mainly take the role of Dungeon Master. This game encouraged me to be a storyteller and has slowly built my confidence in myself in order to share my artistic narration. Normally I would not be able to do this in the form of basic conversations, but *Dungeons and Dragons* allows for a unique environment. I have been playing this game for over ten years, and I have told various tales. Some about heroes saving a town from renegade Orcs, others about re-sealing a demon back into their own dimension, and even helping a mother dragon recover her captive eggs from a band of thieves. This game made me feel comfortable sharing my stories with others, and has improved my critical thinking, and improvisational skills in the narrations, due to unexpected character's choices. Overall, I believe it has strengthened my conceptual intellect. I believe playing the game is like drawing in a sketchbook. It helps to conceptualize

and strengthen your skills. This game is very personal to me and has aided me in becoming a conceptual artist and visual story-teller thanks to being heavily invested in this game.

Another influence I have is comics. It is another form of visual narrations for people to enjoy. Many comics have influenced me to become a better visual storyteller. Even though it might not be obvious at first, each comic, or narrative story, has some sort of external and internal dialogue that speaks to the individual. In order to execute a comic effectively, the author must create a theme, and have their original characters be relatable in some shape or form. Many of the connections made to the audience is through personal conflict, and personality growth of the character. This personal connection can help influence the audience in order to empathize, and to be satisfied when the character overcomes obstacles. Usually, the character's internal conflicts relate to the philosophical debate, and help the audience to understand the character better.

One of the comics that influenced me in understanding character development and themes is called, *Seconds* [Fig 8] by Bryan Lee O' Malley. This particular graphic novel had me immediately immersed in the story, and I had to force myself to put it down. It is about a woman named Katie, who wanted to own a restaurant, and is known as a talented cook. Despite her success, she carries with her the guilt and regrets from her mistakes in life. Through a series of circumstances, she is granted an ability to change, or "fix" her past mistakes. What O'Malley creates stands out to me because he created an interesting, and humanized, protagonist. Katie has strengths and flaws, but the story mainly focuses on her flaws and the trouble she lets them cause. It was interesting to read about this character overcoming obstacles that were laid in front of her, because I personally related to her. It is amazing how human Katie feels, to an extent where the reader develops multiple feelings towards her. While I was reading the novel, I went

through multiple emotional experiences towards Katie as her flaws and strengths were discussed. Katie went through many struggles, and as the reader you questioned yourself if Katie is going to make it out. *Seconds* inspired me to create content that would have an emotional attachment to it and gave me an understanding of creating a story that will have correlation for my audience's personal feelings and experience.

For my creative project, my philosophical debate is Singularity versus Unity. As I said before, it is about relationship; building a stronger connection and understanding for one another. As a visual storyteller, narrative story helps me to better express my thoughts and form a better connection with my audience. Conceptualizing, stories that involve unity between characters have been done before. For example, one that I personally enjoyed is *Steven Universe*, by Rebecca Sugar. Even so, this is not her focus, or her theme. Her main theme for her story is love and equality. She expresses her belief about what love is and how to treat people equally no matter who and what they are. Understanding there are other narrative animations that express those types of themes. Even though relationships are the external theme for my creative project, communication and acceptance is my internal theme. In my version, the theme will be stated differently due to my world and characters concepts. The resolution of the conflict will be uniquely depicted due to character arcs, and due to personal aesthetic.

In this story, I will conceptualize a world for my characters to interact with. I believe this will make it stand out more and highlight its unique aspects. I will develop the background, and personality for my characters in order to make them feel genuine and well-rounded individuals. Fantasy genre has heavily influenced my artistic vision for concepts in characters, and world building, and as such I have integrated magic and mythical monsters into my thesis with my own original concepts. Both of my two characters from my creative project, Iris and Sophi, have a

magical gem embedded into their hands. Each gem bestows a magical power, in which the two sisters can harness. Iris has a red gem and can evoke destructive elements with her emotions. While Sophi has a blue gem and conjures light constructs that resemble objects. She can create things such as a staircase, a wall, a drill, etc.

With my technical background in the 3D animation pipeline, will be able to apply my artistic vision for the aesthetic in this film. The genre of this film is fantasy, and I conceptualize my own version of magic in the world that my characters are in. I am going to achieve 2D stylized animation into the 3D art form. I am not going towards realistic renders, but rather I am going to push myself in researching and develop techniques that will achieve my vision to its fullest.

## References Images











## DESCRIPTION OF IMAGES

Figure 1. Rebecca Sugar. *Steven Universe*, 2013

[http://images.zap2it.com/assets/p9809436\\_b\\_h3\\_aa/steven-universe.jpg](http://images.zap2it.com/assets/p9809436_b_h3_aa/steven-universe.jpg)

Figure 2. Pendleton Ward. *Adventure Time*, 2010

<http://www.newsarama.com/images/i/000/180/268/i02/AdventureTime.jpg>

Figure 3. Bruce Timm. *Batman: Animated Series*, 1992 – 1995

<https://i.ytimg.com/vi/440KnvbkMW4/maxresdefault.jpg>

Figure 4. Akira Toriyoma. *Dragon Ball Z*, 1996 – 2003

<http://vignette2.wikia.nocookie.net/dragonball/images/1/10/EveryoneInDragonBallZ.jpg/revision/latest?cb=20110508001535>

Figure 5. Hiroyuki Imashi. *Gurren Lagann*, 2007 – 2007  
[http://img1.ak.crunchyroll.com/i/spire4/cf99ba5895abff9fa6fc7230a5c6d1b91367626926\\_full.jpg](http://img1.ak.crunchyroll.com/i/spire4/cf99ba5895abff9fa6fc7230a5c6d1b91367626926_full.jpg)

Figure 6. Guillermo del Toro. *Pacific Rim*, 2013  
<http://screenrant0.imgix.net/wp-content/uploads/pacific-rim-2-steven-s-deknight-director.jpg?auto=format&lossless=1&q=90&w=437&h=273&fit=crop>

Figure 7. Peter Jackson. *The Lord of the Rings: Fellowship of Rings*, 2003  
[http://www.weapons-universe.com/Brands/United\\_Cutlery/Lord-of-the-Rings-Swords.jpg](http://www.weapons-universe.com/Brands/United_Cutlery/Lord-of-the-Rings-Swords.jpg)

Figure 8. Bryan Lee O'Malley. *Seconds*, 2014, Graphic Novel, page 95

Figure 9. Lizzy Anderson. Final Concept Image from *Discord*, 2016

Figure 10. Peter Jackson. *The Hobbit*, 2012  
<http://cdn.playbuzz.com/cdn/8626cd1b-0ea0-403e-9321-661957f32bdf/81445a8c-e12d-4ba7-9e66-fbcfe7fdd590.jpg>

## CONCLUSION

This film has a universal message about being in a relationship. Relationships can be difficult and frustrating, and it is always better to approach the matter with patience and honesty. Anyone who has struggled in trying to communicate with someone who is their polar opposite will be able to relate to my character's internal dilemmas and struggles. The beauty of films is that you can create a fantastical world, while also creating characters that will grow internally and overcome obstacles. It is their journey which will leave a lasting impact on the viewer.

*Discord* is one of the few films that takes a personal stance and breaks away from traditional female troupes. I am promoting strong female characters by displaying strength of character in realizing internal dilemmas. A strong character is not only someone who can handle exterior obstacles, but internally obstacles as well.

I want to use this film in order to help shape the art community in order to promote unique aesthetics and perspectives. Oftentimes we as artists want to work alone, when in fact it is our relationship with one another that makes us stronger. In order to create harmonious relationships, we must communicate, and in order to create relationships that last, we have to be honest about our struggles. With that being said, this film will be instrumental in promoting characters who prioritize relationships and will demonstrate that through struggling together they are stronger than they would have been apart.

## EXHIBITION STATEMENT

*Discord* explores the idea of Relationship versus Singularity with telling the story of two magical sisters that overcome obstacles together rather than individually. In which, the two sisters have an embedded magical gem onto back of their hand, and intricate glowing tattoo that stems from the gem to their shoulder.

I want my audience to empathize with my characters, and I hope it will inspire them to work hard to keep their personal relational strong. My main characters are sisters, and they have the opposite personality. While they are family their bond is not strong, and their dilemma becomes overwhelming to handle alone. Within the film, the characters go through growth with their relationship and in which they overcome the obstacles that have laid out before them.

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